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DEATH A COVENANTED BLESSING TO THE
CHRISTIAN.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF



Mrs. Judith Waldo,

WIFE OF

CALVIN WALDO, ESQ.

JUNE 6th, A. D. 1803.

BY THEODORE HINSDALE, A. M.

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A Funeral Sermon.

1 CORINTHIANS, iii. ch. Part of 21st and 22d ver.

For all things are yours—whether life or death.

IT is an important christian duty carefully to observe, and faithfully to improve the various dispensations of Divine Providence. To this purpose we are all concerned, tho' some in a more especial manner, with the very affecting instance of mortality which is now before us.

This melancholy event, and the particular request of the chief mourner, that I would improve it in a discourse adapted to this solemn occasion, have led my thoughts to this passage of sacred scripture. In it you will observe that death itself, as well as life, is entered on the list of benefits to the christian, as a part of the inheritance bequeathed to him by Christ, in the testament of grace. And may this providence, and this passage be blessed of God to lead us into such profitable meditations, on this occasion, as may afford a happy experience of its benefit.

To all mortals, unacquainted with the gospel of Christ, it must appear absurd to recount Death—the dread of nature, the king of terrors, amongst the greatest of blessings. And even of those who enjoy the gospel, none are reconciled to death as a blessing, but the thrice happy few, who by faith have reposed their all

for time and eternity in the hands of Christ, the Almighty Savior; and laid up in heaven their treasure, to which they know they cannot come, but by passing through the gloomy vale of death. To all such, indeed, will death be ultimately a blessing. And to such only the holy apostle addresses himself, when he saith, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." To all of this character; their own death, whenever it shall come, shall be unspeakable gain. In this light have holy men regarded, and sought for it. Job saith—"I would not live always," and St. Paul, "I am in a straight betwixt two—having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." "For me to die is gain."

Though impenitent sinners have at present no part nor lot in covenanted mercies, and have awful reason to fear their own death as the end of all their joys, and the beginning of eternal sorrows; yet even to them, the death of fellow-creatures, and especially the death of dear friends, and solemn meditation on their own dissolution, may, by the grace of God, be beneficial, as a means of eclipsing in their view the glory of the present world, and bringing them to repose their souls on a crucified Savior, and laying up their treasure in heaven; in a word, of bringing them to embrace the covenant of God, and to be of that happy number, to whom death will be eternal gain.

But how is this wonderful change in the visage of death effected?—It is by Jesus Christ turning away the sting of death, which is sin. Christ, in his death on the cross, suffered for sinners the penalty of the vi-

olated law. Christ, in his perfect obedience unto death, fulfilled its precept, and merited for them eternal life. The believing sinner, on union to Christ by faith, is freely pardoned : released from eternal death, and has a right to eternal life conferred ; has the beginning of it bestowed in the renovation of his nature, by the spirit of God ; by which the dominion of sin is put down : God in the testament of grace has become his God, and everlasting portion. But inasmuch as the consummation of this blessedness cannot exist on this side of Heaven, whither flesh and blood cannot enter, death still awaits the children of God as well as others. Not indeed as a curse but a blessing, to transfer them from this world of sins, sorrows and tears, to their God, their Savior, and their everlasting rest in Heaven. Therefore saith the spirit—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. They do rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." All the waste, which death makes on them, is much more than regained by a joyful resurrection in glory, when "this mortal shall have put on immortality, and this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and death itself shall have been swallowed up in victory," as it is written, "O Death, where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory?"

In the mean time, in this new order of grace, whatever belongs to the curse ; whatever tends to impress the soul of man with a sense of its own sinfulness and misery ; of the vanity, weakness and frailty of our nature and condition, becomes a powerful means in the hand of the divine spirit, to abase the pride of man ; to empty him of the idolatrous love of creatures, and confidence in them ; and of shutting him up to the one only gospel way of coming to a soul-satisfying happiness in the enjoyment of God. As the sin and ruin of

our nature is the want of love, faith, hope and life towards God, and in an excessive idolatrous love of the present world, so our preparation for heaven and glory consists of these two essential parts; *being mortified to the world, and made alive to God.* And as nothing so much obstructs the beginning and progress of this life of God in our souls, as this idolatrous love of the world; so nothing tends more to its promotion, than the emptying our hearts of the love of creatures. And what means can be better adapted, or more efficacious to this end, than a devout meditation on death? On the common mortality of all men; the death of near and dear friends and our own approaching dissolution? Hence that fervent aspiration of Moses, for his people, "O that ye were wise, that ye understood this, that ye would consider your latter end." And again, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Of the same import is that prayer of David, and, O that the same may be the prayer and unremitting endeavor of us all: "Lord make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am."

1. The common mortality of all men, makes all worldly good so exceedingly short-lived, and uncertain, as to display its vanity and emptiness in the most impressive manner? Do we not see how persons die in all ages? In infancy, in childhood, in youth, at middle and old age? Those who die in old age say with Jacob, "few and evil have the days and the years of my life been." The longest life is but a span; and nothing on earth is any more durable or certain to us than this vain life. The end of this puts a final period to all our enjoyment of the goods of this world. What a vanity of vanities does this one thought inscribe on

them all? What fleeting bubbles does it render all boasted worldly distinctions? Surely all the glory of man is but a fading flower. "All flesh is as grass."—"Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity." Must not a realizing sense of this cast down the haughty looks of man; give him a disrelish for worldly goods, and cause him to pant after the eternal, uncreated, all-sufficient God, as his portion, support and felicity?

2. The death of near and dear friends, impresses the same ideas in a still more sensible and affecting manner. This is not a lesson presented to the eye and ear; it is spoken to the heart. Here is not only an evidence, but a striking instance of vanity. For here a darling comfort is blasted. Some of the strongest affections of the soul, for created good, are most painfully crossed, and disappointed. A chief part of all that we valued the world for, has vanished away like a shadow. A sensible conviction is impressed upon the soul, that the nearer worldly good is to the heart, and the more the heart is set upon it, the greater the wound it inflicts when torn from the fond embrace. May it not be expected that an heart thus wounded, will fear, any more to lay up its whole felicity in such fading enjoyments? that it will henceforward aspire to a permanent, substantial joy, which is alloyed with no sorrow? That it will not betake itself, for a cure, to creatures, which are physicians of no value; but to God himself, who has wounded, and who alone can heal the wound his own hand hath inflicted? That it will now turn away from the failing streams to the unfailing fountain, and seek a supply from the all-sufficient Creator, of what it has lost in the creature?

Common mortality, and the death of friends, may in another way be beneficial: Both are the bitter fruits of sin; and give a very awful impression of the holy displeasure of God: Hath he subjected the whole human race to so terrible an evil for one offence? How great must be his detestation of every instance and degree of sin? How solemn an admonition then does death administer to us all to hate; repent of, and avoid sin? The death of friends is a special rebuke to surviving relatives: It is the rod, and voice of God, calling them to search out the cause, why God is contending with them; to consider their own ways, and turn to him who smiteth them. When it has this happy effect, it begets in them, not that "sorrow of the world which worketh death;" but that "Godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." Then they confess and forsake their sins; submit to the will of a chastening God; and learn to love him more, and serve him better. Thus the furnace of affliction does not consume, but purge them. In this furnace they lose nothing, but come out of it as gold seven times purified.

The death of fellow-creatures and dear friends loudly call us to a devout, and daily meditation on our own approaching dissolution, and this is

3. A third way in which death becomes a benefit to the people of God. It is exceedingly necessary and useful to maintain a deep and realizing sense of our own approaching dissolution; and daily, and devoutly to meditate upon it. And no means so powerfully impresses this sense on our souls, and induces us to such meditation, as the death of others, and, especially, of those who are near and dear to us. O that we were

wise, that we understood this—that we would consider our latter end ! To confine our views within the limits of this momentary life is the height of folly.—We shall never begin to be wise, until our chief good is viewed as lying on the other side of death and the grave. If ours is such, we must daily, in our thoughts, pass that gloomy vale. How can we do this with comfort, until the frightful visage of death is rendered familiar by frequent meditation ? Nothing like this, in the light of the cross of Christ, smoothes the rugged brow of death and disarms it of terror. Besides this, a realizing sense of death is one of the best helps to form a just estimate of life ; and is a most powerful incitement to duty. It shews us the world without disguise ; and enervates the force of all its temptations. A dying man cannot be allured with all its charms ; nor affrighted by any of its frowns. It directs to the best performance of duty, because it urges us to the most essential and necessary things first, and keeps them uppermost in our view. It will stimulate us to do the most good we possibly can in every present time, knowing that “ there is no work, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave, whither we are going.” It will also lead us directly, by way of anticipation, to feed our souls with the heavenly blessedness ; and there to derive our support and comfort in this world of trouble and of tears ; and to arm us against the fears of a dissolution.

Thus, in all these ways, and in more that might be mentioned, may death, from a curse, be converted into a blessing ; first, to impenitent sinners, to bring them to repentance and take upon them rest in God through Jesus Christ : And, secondly, to believers ; to mortify them more and more to the world, and prepare them for the heavenly glory ; and by opening to them, at least a door for deliverance from their sins, labors, trou-

bles and sorrows, and of entrance into the everlasting rest prepared for them in heaven.

What cause have we to adore, and give glory to the wisdom and mercy of God the Father, and to the grace, compassion and condescension of Jesus Christ ; who have devised, and made known to us the way, in which so dreadful an evil, so tremendous a curse as death, may be converted into a blessing ? and to give all diligence, in the ways suggested above, that it may be a blessing to each of us.

And for this purpose may we suitably improve the very affecting instance of death, which has called us, this day, to the house of mourning, and, at this hour, to this house of worship. There is not one of us all, but who has a deep concern in this dispensation of Divine Providence. Its language is, "Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." "Be ye also ready."

I feel incompetent to give the character of the deceased. I trust it will not be expected. I may not, however, omit to observe, that Mrs. JUDITH WALDO, had for several years been a Christian professor, and a member of the Church ; and, in her life, adorned her profession. In her domestic relations as a wife, and the mother of a numerous family, those, who knew her best, will witness, that she was ever exemplary for discretion, fidelity, persevering industry, and a prudent economy ; and that, with equal patience and submission to the Divine will, she endured the tedious and increasing infirmities, which preceded, and brought on her dissolution. By information of her now mourning friend it appears, that, some weeks before her decease, she freely expressed to him her apprehensions of its near approach—and that, on mature deliberation, she

had made up her mind in reference to it : and was both ready and willing to die, whenever it should be the will of God, and said many things tending to assuage his grief and to prepare his mind to meet the event. On the whole, we have reason to hope and trust, that she is one of those blessed, who have fallen asleep in Jesus—and to whom death is eternal gain. Wherefore then should we weep for her? But, as the mourning husband, and children, and other relations have a deep concern in this bereavement, I shall take the liberty to address to them, respectively, a few words ; and then to the audience in general :

To the bereaved relatives—

DEAR FRIENDS,

We feel that your affliction must be great. And particularly yours, sir, who are called to mourn the loss of the wife of your youth, the beloved partner of the joys and sorrows, both of your younger and more advanced life ; and who, you hoped, would have continued such to the close of your earthly journey. It is not the hand or counsel of man ; but the wise and holy will of God that has inflicted this deep wound in your heart. Our sympathy, however cordial, tho' it may soothe, for a moment, the anguish, cannot heal the wound ; but God, who, for wise and holy ends has inflicted, can heal it from its deepest source. To Him, dear sir, we most earnestly commend you. To Him, in Jesus Christ, we wish you to repair, that this death which is now yours to your sorrow, may be yours in the best sense, in which death of friends is a benefit to those, who are in Christ. May it be sanctified to you, not only as a means of preparation for following your departed friend, but of your obtaining grace of God to sustain and discharge the double weight of care and

duty, which now devolves on you in respect of your dear motherless children. While she was with them, we doubt not, but that she instructed them in the best things, and prayed for them that their precious souls might be saved in the day of the Lord. This duty, with redoubled weight devolves now on their father; and we hope and trust, that he will not fail to discharge it faithfully.

Dear bereaved children, we wonder not to see you weep. Your bereavement is great. Time will assuage the present poignancy of your grief;—but *even then* you will greatly miss your dear mother. It is an unspeakable Divine favor to you that you have had her presence, her instructions, her counsels, her prayers and examples. Do not fail, in the midst of your grief, to thank God that you were permitted to enjoy them so long. Your loss of them cannot now be repaired, but in God your heavenly Father, to whom she devoted you in the christian baptism. Now that one of your earthly parents has forsaken you, may He take you up, and be infinitely better to you than any mortal parent can be. To Him may you devote yourselves in Jesus Christ, and He will “never leave—will never forsake you.” He will “give you grace and glory and no good thing withhold.” O set not your hearts on the gaieties, the elegancies, the ornaments or riches of this vain life.—They pass away as a shadow. “Seek first the kingdom of God,” and “all these things” so far as He sees best, “shall be added unto you.” Forget not the counsels and examples of your mother. Go now to your surviving parent for counsel and instruction. You will do all in your power, by a discreet, dutiful and respectful deportment to lighten his burden, and lessen his grief. O let him have the joy to see all his “children walking in the truth.”

We deeply sympathise with the chief mourner, his children, and all the bereaved relatives and other friends—and commend you all to the compassion of our Great High Priest, “who hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;” who of “God is anointed to bind up the broken hearted, and appoint unto them who mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” The will of the Lord is done. That will is wise and good. May you all meet it with a cordial Amen; saying, Blessed be He, who hath given, and blessed be He, who hath taken away. May it sink deep into your hearts, that, *both in respect of duty and happiness, it is incomparably more important that you be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, than that you should enjoy any earthly friend,*

So far as the deceased has left evidence that she died in the Lord, you need not mourn for her. And while you mourn for yourselves, embrace that religion of Christ, which, as we trust, enabled her to finish her course with joy; and which alone can enable you to possess your souls in peace and patience under the present, and all future trials in this vale of tears. Your friend shall not return to you. But soon you must go the way she has gone. What remains then, but that you do improve in this furnace of affliction, that death may be yours, not as now, to your grief, but to your everlasting joy. So it certainly will, when it shall have mortified in you an inordinate love of creatures, and brought your hearts to rest in God as your everlasting portion.

What have you now left in this world, more stable than what you have lost? How frail is your own life, on which all the rest depend? O may the present im-

pression of emptiness in creatures, never be effaced from your souls, until hungering and thirsting for that meat and drink that never perish, you may be filled from God himself, the fountain of good. May the bitterness of this sorrow embitter sin to you; and its fruit be to take it away. May the death of your friend so prepare you for your own, that whenever it shall come, you may bid it a hearty welcome; and find it to be in the highest sense, a blessing, by putting a final period to all the sorrows of this mortal life, and opening to you a passport into that "fulness of joy, which is in the presence of God," and to those "rivers of pleasure, which flow at his right hand forevermore."

The discourse will now close with a few words addressed to this numerous audience in general.

Is death on the list of christian privileges? Is it in so many ways, through the death of Christ, capable of being turned into a blessing, both to sinners and to saints? How deeply are we all concerned to reap some saving benefit from the spectacle of death, which has just passed before our eyes? Let us draw near, and duly consider that pale, breathless corpse, which we have just seen deposited in the silent grave. As that now is, such must we all shortly be. How fondly do we cleave to this momentary life, and its fleeting enjoyments? How powerful is the charm, which chains our foolish hearts to this vain world? And when conscience demands an immediate attention to the concerns of the soul, and eternity, and a speedy preparation for it, how prone are we to put them by with a dilatory answer? How loudly does this spectacle of death bespeak the folly of such a course? The utter uncertainty of life; the certainty of death—our nearness to the judgment seat, and a boundless eternity; and the wis-

dom of making it our first and chief care to lay a good foundation for the time to come? O may we all take warning and be wise, and learn the lessons which are here written with a pen of iron. Let them sink deep into our hearts, and have their full impression. Shall the precious lives of our fellow creatures be cut off to alarm and admonish us, and shall we get no benefit from them? Will they not then rise up in judgment against us another day? Have any to this moment been secure in sin, and wholly unprepared for death? Let them now be alarmed; awake from their slumbers, and seek the oil of grace in their hearts, before the door is shut. Are any, who have obtained the name of wise virgins, but are sleeping and slumbering with the foolish? Hear now the cry, behold the bridegroom cometh—O arise and trim your lamps—watch and pray that you may be found of him in peace. You who stand in the endearing relation of husband or wife—see in this glass how soon that tender, important connection may be broken by death. O perform faithfully all the duties of it while it continues. How soon may you, who are parents, be parted from your children. Improve then every opportunity to instruct them in the things of God—to warn, counsel and pray with and for them, that their precious souls may not be eternally lost. Children, whose parents yet live, behold these bereaved children, and think how soon your parents may be taken from you, or you from them. Do to them, and obtain from them, all the good you possibly can, while you enjoy them. In a word, let us all comport with the important admonition—“Whatever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, wisdom nor device in the grave, whither thou goest.” And may God of his great mercy work in us effectually both to will and to do, whatever is

pleasing in his sight; that whenever, sooner or later, this "earthly house of our tabernacle shall be dissolved, we may have an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens," which God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

